

World & Nation

Chairman of writing committee sees pastoral draft as 'realistic, forceful'

By Pat Morrison

Joliet, Ill. (NC) — The man behind the bishops' pastoral on women's concerns, Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, sees the first draft as a realistic document that forcefully "says things that needed to be said" about such topics as the feminization of poverty.

Bishop Imesch is chairman of the U.S. bishops' committee on women in the Church and in society and of the bishops' writing committee responsible for the first draft of the pastoral, "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption."

The first draft of the pastoral — written by a committee of six bishops (including Rochester's Bishop Matthew H. Clark) and seven female consultants — was released April 12. The bishops are scheduled to discuss the document when they meet June 24-27 in Collegeville, Minn., and a revised draft is tentatively scheduled to be given to the bishops for debate and vote in November 1989.

"I would not call it a radical document, but I would call it a realistic document," Bishop Imesch said in an interview with the *Catholic Explorer*, newspaper of the Joliet diocese.

The letter is not going to please everyone, the bishop said. "There is no way that it could. There is no way we would want (it) to!"

Some feminists, he said, "will probably say 'so what?' For them it will not be enough." For others, what the pastoral says — urging full equality for lay women in the Church, asking for study on the question of women deacons, affirming women in professional choices and

in motherhood and homemaking as vocations — "will be too much."

"But for the wider Church I believe it says things that needed to be said and that have not been said before in our Church. And I believe it addresses them powerfully, forcefully."

Bishop Imesch predicted that much of the reporting on the document will sensationalize certain issues — female altar servers, the ban on women priests. But, he said, if people limited themselves to such reports they would "miss much of the real depth" of numerous other themes that the letter treats.

One of these topics, he said, is the feminization of poverty. Based on statistics culled from a wide range of sources and from women's personal accounts, the document "presents some statistics that are really kind of shaking" regarding women and poverty in the United States, he said.

"The number of women who do not receive any child support — that's astounding," the bishop said. "That's all in the letter, and we address it."

Bishop Imesch said the section calling for a study of the diaconate for women "is not new, and it didn't originate with us," noting that the idea was discussed in the 1976 Vatican document, "Inter Insigniores," which addresses and reiterated Church teachings on priesthood as reserved to males alone.

The question of women deacons, he said, "was first recommended by Rome" and was never resolved in that document, he said, and the pastoral's current recommendation urges Rome to thoroughly pursue the matter. "Rome invited the opportunity to do that."

Asked which sections of the lengthy document are his personal favorites, Bishop Imesch responded, "This may sound strange, but I think I'm happiest with the beginning and with the conclusion."

"The beginning of the letter sets the biblical basis for the equality of men and women" and the conclusion, "is a beautiful meditation on the role of the Blessed Mother."

Many reports to the committee commented on women's affirmation of Mary as integral to their understanding of their role in the Church. The pastoral's conclusion, Bishop Imesch said, presents Mary "as the initiator and energizer of the early Church."



Jack Spratt/NC News
Mercy Sister Maria Francis Conway, a eucharistic minister, distributes Communion during Mass at a New England church. The bishops' first draft of the pastoral letter on women calls for "women's more direct involvement in the life of the Church."

Getting copies of the draft

Readers who want to obtain the full text of the first draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption: A Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns for Church and Society" should contact Origins, NC Documentary Service. The price of one copy is \$3.50, which includes postage and handling. Payment must accompany order. Write: Origins, NC, News Service, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Multiple copy rates can be requested by calling (202) 659-6742.

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